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FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6027
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UNCLAS NAIROBI 001414

DEPT FOR AF/E, AF/EPS, G/TIP AND DRL/IL
DEPT ALSO PASS TO USTR FOR BILL JACKSON
DEPT ALSO PASS TO USTR FOR LEWIS KARESH
DEPT ALSO PASS TO DEPT OF LABOR FOR SUDHA HALEY, PATRICK WHITE AND
MICHAL MURPHY

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM ELAB KE](#)

SUBJECT: KENYA LAUNCHES CHILD HELPLINE TO FIGHT CHILD ABUSE, LABOR
AND TRAFFICKING

¶1. Summary: The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs and Childline Kenya officially launched the 116 Child Helpline joint initiative on May 31, 2008. Children and others can call toll-free on any landline or cell phone to report cases of child abuse, labor or trafficking and receive counseling or referral to government or NGO service providers. The Center received over 14,000 calls in April and May, and we hope it will make a significant contribution to improving the treatment of children in Kenya. End summary.

Background on Childline Kenya

¶2. In 2004, Plan International started the Childline Initiative as a supplement to the Department of Children's Affairs help line, which had become moribund. Plan International recruited Kenya's leading child advocacy NGOs as members, including UNICEF, CRADLE, World Vision, ANPPCAN, the Child Welfare Society of Kenya, and the Women's Right Awareness Program. Plan International organized a Childline Steering Committee to decide policy and strategic direction, and a secretariat composed of the national coordinator and project team for daily management. Then it spun Childline Kenya off into a separate NGO.

¶3. Childline Kenya works to protect children from all forms of violence and abuse and to create a culture of children's rights within Kenya so that crimes against children will not go unchallenged. Its motto is "Break the silence on child abuse."

¶4. Childline Kenya provides a nation-wide 24-hour toll-free helpline for counseling and referral services to children, young persons and families in difficult situations. Childline's main strategy is to link children with GOK agencies, partner NGOs, and professionals with the capacity to provide the necessary services in the areas of health, legal aid, counseling, rescue and emergency response, child rights promotion, shelter, ICT, and advocacy work.

¶5. In late 2006 Childline Kenya began offering counseling services through a toll-free number provided by parastatal Telkom Kenya. From November 2006 to February 2007 it received a total of 2,258 calls from all over Kenya, an average of 15 calls/day. However, the 0800-221-0800 was difficult to remember, and only available via land line, not to more numerous cell phone users. Despite some publicity efforts, it was not widely known.

Struggle to Expand Operation

¶6. Throughout 2007, Childline lobbied the ICT regulator Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK) and major cell phone companies Safaricom and Celtel to establish a toll-free emergency number for Childline. It also negotiated terms and conditions for a joint operation with the Children's Department in the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Department provided an expanded facility and telcom connections for the Childline counselors, and co-located several Children's Officers to enable quick action by field officers

for referrals. The CCK authorized the 116 toll-free service in December 2007. To assist Childline, the Embassy nominated the Director for an International Visitors Program on NGO management, which she found very useful. The Labor Officer also invited the Director to make a presentation to the Donors Working Group on Trafficking in Persons and Child Protection Issues.

Finally, the Launch of 116 Service

17. In the deal between the governing Party of National Unity (PNU) and the Opposition ODM establishing a coalition government, Children's Services was moved from the Ministry of Home Affairs to the renamed Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs in early April. 116 service and the joint Childline/Children's Services call center began operations in April 2008, but without great fanfare while waiting for the Ministry to sort out the reorganization. Finally, on May 31, Minister Esther Murugi Mathenge, Permanent Secretary Leah Gwiyo, and Children's Affairs Secretary Professor Jacqueline Oduol led a ceremony celebrating the official launch of the Child Helpline. They claimed (incorrectly) that this was the first child helpline in Africa and in the world, and extolled the progress it marked in the protection of Kenya's children.

18. Childline officials gave the Labor Officer a tour of the new facility and introduced the volunteer counselors, all of whom are students or graduates in social sciences or psychology. The Center received 8,000 substantive calls in April and 6,000 in May, so demand for assistance is strong, and knowledge of the service is getting out to children and others. Most calls involve domestic conflict, custody and maintenance issues, emotional abuse, child labor, child prostitution, early or forced marriages, or general counseling. Childline will keep monthly statistics to track the

complaints. Since demand threatens to overwhelm the current facility, Childline's next goal is to open call centers in each of the provinces.

Comment

19. Kenya's provision of a toll-free child helpline that allows qualified counselors to help children and connect them to service providers is a significant step forward in Kenya's fight against child abuse, trafficking and labor. The scarcity of resources prevents the service providers from helping all children, especially in urgent cases requiring transportation from remote locations. However, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is working with NGOs, community organizations, and professionals to expand the directory of service providers to assist victims. We hope the call center statistics will provide more insight into the incidence and geographic concentration of the various forms of child abuse.

RANNEBERGER